

Why GAO Did This Study

CBP—a component within the Department of Homeland Security—is responsible for securing U.S. borders and facilitating legal travel and trade. Drug-trafficking and other transnational criminal organizations are seeking to target CBP employees with bribes to facilitate the illicit transport of drugs, aliens, and other contraband across the southwest U.S. border, in particular. CBP IA is responsible for promoting the integrity of CBP’s workforce, programs, and operations; and CBP components implement integrity initiatives. GAO was asked to review CBP’s efforts to ensure the integrity of its workforce. This report examines (1) data on arrests of and allegations against CBP employees for corruption or misconduct, (2) CBP’s implementation of integrity-related controls, and (3) CBP’s strategy for its integrity programs. GAO analyzed arrest and allegation data since fiscal year 2005 and 2006, respectively, reviewed integrity-related policies and procedures, and interviewed CBP officials in headquarters and at four locations along the southwest border selected for geographic location, among other factors.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that CBP, among other things, track and maintain data on sources of information used to determine which applicants are unsuitable for hire, assess the feasibility of expanding the polygraph program to incumbent officers and agents, consistently conduct quality assurance reviews, and set timelines for completing and implementing a comprehensive integrity strategy. DHS concurred and reported taking steps to address the recommendations.

View [GAO-13-59](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or gamblierr@gao.gov.

BORDER SECURITY

Additional Actions Needed to Strengthen CBP Efforts to Mitigate Risk of Employee Corruption and Misconduct

What GAO Found

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) data indicate that arrests of CBP employees for corruption-related activities since fiscal years 2005 account for less than 1 percent of CBP’s entire workforce per fiscal year. The majority of arrests of CBP employees were related to misconduct. There were 2,170 reported incidents of arrests for acts of misconduct such as domestic violence or driving under the influence from fiscal year 2005 through fiscal year 2012, and a total of 144 current or former CBP employees were arrested or indicted for corruption-related activities, such as the smuggling of aliens and drugs, of whom 125 have been convicted as of October 2012. Further, the majority of allegations against CBP employees since fiscal year 2006 occurred at locations along the southwest border. CBP officials have stated that they are concerned about the negative impact that these cases have on agencywide integrity.

CBP employs screening tools to mitigate the risk of employee corruption and misconduct for both applicants (e.g., background investigations and polygraph examinations) and incumbent CBP officers and Border Patrol agents (e.g., random drug tests and periodic reinvestigations). However, CBP’s Office of Internal Affairs (IA) does not have a mechanism to maintain and track data on which of its screening tools (e.g., background investigation or polygraph examination) provided the information used to determine which applicants were not suitable for hire. Maintaining and tracking such data is consistent with internal control standards and could better position CBP IA to gauge the relative effectiveness of its screening tools. CBP IA is also considering requiring periodic polygraphs for incumbent officers and agents; however, it has not yet fully assessed the feasibility of expanding the program. For example, CBP has not yet fully assessed the costs of implementing polygraph examinations on incumbent officers and agents, including costs for additional supervisors and adjudicators, or factors such as the trade-offs associated with testing incumbent officers and agents at various frequencies. A feasibility assessment of program expansion could better position CBP to determine whether and how to best achieve its goal of strengthening integrity-related controls for officers and agents. Further, CBP IA has not consistently conducted monthly quality assurance reviews of its adjudications since 2008, as required by internal policies, to help ensure that adjudicators are following procedures in evaluating the results of the preemployment and periodic background investigations. CBP IA officials stated that they have performed some of the required checks since 2008, but they could not provide data on how many checks were conducted. Without these quality assurance checks, it is difficult for CBP IA to determine the extent to which deficiencies, if any, exist in the adjudication process.

CBP does not have an integrity strategy, as called for in its *Fiscal Year 2009-2014 Strategic Plan*. During the course of our review, CBP IA began drafting a strategy, but CBP IA’s Assistant Commissioner stated the agency has not set target timelines for completing and implementing this strategy. Moreover, he stated that there has been significant cultural resistance among some CBP components in acknowledging CBP IA’s authority for overseeing all integrity-related activities. Setting target timelines is consistent with program management standards and could help CBP monitor progress made toward the development and implementation of an agencywide strategy.